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May 3, 2001

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2001-100

Former Rwandan bishop pleads not guilty, complains of arresting officers' 'brutalities'

by Jan Nunley

(ENS) Former Church of Rwanda bishop Samuel Musabyimana has entered a plea of "not guilty" to charges brought against him before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania.

Musabyimana is charged with genocide or complicity in genocide; conspiracy to commit genocide; and extermination as a crime against humanity. During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, he was bishop of Shyogwe, a diocese located in the central Gitarama region of Rwanda. The indictment alleges that he ordered refugees who fled to his diocese to be registered according to their ethnic group. Soldiers and militia used these lists, with his knowledge, to single out Tutsi refugees and take them to their deaths, the indictment says.

The indictment also alleges that he held meetings with Rwandan government officials complicit in the genocide and carried out missions abroad on behalf of that government. It also says that he paid members of the *interahamwe* militia who were killing Tutsis.

Musabyimana complained to the court that he had been subjected to "brutalities" during his arrest April 26 by Kenyan police, acting in the presence of ICTR officials.

"My arrest was made by individuals who did not want to be identified and who didn't show the warrant for arrest," said Musabyimana, who entered the courtroom dressed in an episcopal cassock and wearing a pectoral cross. "My residence was violated, searched and family belongings including the

searched and family belongings, including the identity papers of visitors, were taken away. My office was ransacked, all equipment, all files were taken without an inventory."

Musabyamina's court-appointed attorney, Bharat Chadha of Tanzania, also protested that ICTR rules had been violated during the arrest. His Kenyan lawyer, Ojwang Agina, complained last week to the Nairobi High Court that the arrest was illegal, saying that his client was only shown the arrest warrant after arriving at the ICTR detention center in Arusha, and that he himself was manhandled and denied access to his client.

The presiding judge said the matter of the arrest could be addressed in a pre-trial motion.

Musabyimana told the court that he wished to protest his innocence to the Christian community and his colleagues in the Anglican church, including the archbishop of Canterbury. "They should be assured that there is no blood on my hands," he said. "My conscience is quiet."

He denounced what he called "the evil and the lie" which would be overcome "in the name of Jesus Christ." He said he would "pray for all Rwandans imprisoned and accused of all kinds of crimes, in Rwanda, in Belgium, even here in Arusha and elsewhere. I say to them no matter what, Christ does not abandon us, he is here at our sides."

--The Rev. Jan Nunley is deputy director of Episcopal News Service. Sources include reports by Hirondelle News Agency of Tanzania.

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